

ELIZABETH SMITH EWING TO MACK

May 14th 1865

Dear Brother Mc

As Lea has gon to Sabath School i will improve the present moments in writing to you. we are all in good health except your father has a catch in his back. it hurts him So he cant hardly rais up or down he haint able to do any thing nor he hadent ought to when he feels the best. but he is ancious to get corn planted it has rained almost every other day all Spring the ground is to wet to plow but Lea has made out to plow his Stuble ground and a patch reaching from the north Side of your paps garden to the road and about 2 acres of the peace by Lewises. they want to put out enough for all of us. Lea Sayed for me to tell you to hurry home as quick as you Can, as pap haint able to do any thing So you Can help tend the Corn he Said if you got home by the 10th of June you Could help plant it. being So wet makes Slow work. yesterday was a very pleasant day but rained last nigh[t] So i Couldent go to Sabath School with the baby i hope it will clear up So i can go to meeting to night. i received a leter from Lydia Hank yesterday dated 10th they was all well. DC. Anda [Andy] Al Sam and Hank was al rite the 11th but didnt know when they would be home not any way untill after the grand review of the Army which will take place Some time in June. Commodore hasent got home yet unless he Came last night. he has had a perilous trip to get home, which has caused us untoled trouble but the cau[s]e of Disaster turned out Victorious on our Side although hundreds fell. i Supose you read of the explosion of the Steemer Sultana on the mississippi River on the 27th of Aprile Com was one of the Crew. out of 2800 a board 1400 was lost it Seamed as there was no hope left but a weeks time and a long one it was brought the glad tiding that he was Saved. he wrote at memphis but his leter didnt come through and then he wrote the 8th he was at Camp Chase Ohio well, after the explosion he Jumped in the water and Steered for the Shore a mile off. the curant being So Strong when he reached the Shore he was Six miles below. narrow escape from death. it Seams the Strong arm of god has Shielded him through dangers Starvation and the raging waters, and i hope and pray that he Still will Shield him untill he returns home what hapy hour we have antisipated when our brothers husbands friends all return from this cruel war now Mc i will Stop and put on the finishhing Stroke when Lea gets back i hope Com will Come along with him from Lib now i will finish pap and mother come up hear it was all that pap could do to get hear he Cant hardly rais up or down it is about cleared off i guess we will go to meeting to night com didnt come last night i want to See him So bad this from lib make them hurry up cakes and let you off

Note: I have often heard Com Smith, aunt Lib's brother, tell of his experiences at the time of the explosion of the Sultana. The boat was overloaded with exchanged prisoners coming north. The men were in a weakened condition owing to their recent imprisonment. The boiler "blew up" and of course the boat went down. Smith believed that a shell or bomb had been secreted in the fuel for the express purpose of causing an explosion. The men who were on deck and not too close to the boiler had a chance for their lives by jumping into the river and floating or swimming until rescued. Many of course were drowned in the attempt. Smith used to have a large photograph of the Sultana and its passengers before the tragedy occurred. Joe Stevens, a well know live stock dealer, of Hillsdale, was another one who, like Smith, escaped. They used to tell the story that he floated down the Mississippi on a bale of hay until it finally floated ashore when Tom dragged it upon the banks and offered it for sale to the highest bidder.

Note: “At the close of the war, Camp Fisk was established near Vicksburg for the general exchange of prisoners captured during the operations of the armies in the West. . . . The Federal transport Sultana was busily engaged during the spring of 1865 in carrying the released Federal soldiers to their homes. [The Sultana was] loaded with the last shipment of paroled Union soldiers to the number of 2,134. The same day, April 27, 1865, she arrived at Memphis. While steaming along some 90 miles above that point, her boilers suddenly exploded and she sunk almost immediately. During the war the levees on both sides of the river had been so demolished that all the bottom lands were inundated, and at this point were covered with water to a width of 50 miles. But few of the ill-fated Union soldiers managed to save their lives. About 1,900 of them perished. A survivor relates that while clinging to a log with three other men, one committed suicide rather than endure the agony caused by the icy water. At Memphis the Federal authorities gathered all the floating bodies they could. Many were found as far below the scene of the disaster as Helena [Arkansas].” (From Photographic History of the Civil War, New York, 1911, Vol. I, p. 108.)